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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BEN RAY LUJÁN, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You are our fortress. Thank You for surrounding us with Your walls of goodness, mercy, and love. Even when overwhelmed, we remain confident. Great and marvelous are Your works.

Today, inspire our lawmakers to again seek Your wisdom. May they cry out to You for guidance and receive Your light to illuminate the path ahead.

Lord, be merciful to them and answer their prayers, for You are the God of their salvation. Remind them that You are alive and in control of all challenges that confront our Nation and world.

We pray in Your powerful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 10, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable BEN RAY LUJÁN, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. LUJÁN thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today, the Senate has a packed schedule. By the end of the day, the Senate will have confirmed another three members of President Biden's Cabinet.

First up is Representative MARCIA FUDGE to serve as the 18th Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. What an excellent choice for the job. She represented the people of Ohio in Congress since 2008 and, before that, served as the first African American and first female mayor of Warrensville Heights in Ohio.

She has a difficult job ahead of her. Millions of Americans are behind on the rent and 3 million homeowners are in forbearance. At the same time, we are on the verge of passing major assistance for renters and for homeowners. As the incoming Secretary, I know Representative FUDGE will implement that assistance with alacrity. And, of course, I will be focusing, among other issues in housing, on public housing, which I know she cares about a great deal as well.

Later this afternoon, we will move to the confirmation of Merrick Garland to

become Attorney General. After Donald Trump spent 4 years, 4 long years, subverting the powers of the Justice Department for his own political benefit, treating the Attorney General like his own personal defense lawyer, America can breathe a sigh of relief that we are finally going to have someone like Merrick Garland leading the Justice Department, someone with integrity, independence, respect for the rule of law, and credibility on both sides of the aisle. He understands that the job of Attorney General is one to protect the rule of law, unlike the previous Attorneys General under President Trump who, too often, just bowed to his whim and his will when it was against rule of law.

It is confounding, in light of all of that, that Republicans have chosen—some of them anyway—to delay his nomination, particularly in the aftermath of the Capitol attacks, but he will be confirmed today, despite their attempts to stonewall the process.

Finally, Mr. President, the Senate will confirm Michael Regan to serve as EPA Administrator. Once again, the change between the previous administration and the incoming Administration will be dramatic. Under Donald Trump, the EPA weakened environmental protections, fudged the science, and completely ignored climate change to potentially, unfortunately, disastrous effect.

It is high time the Senate confirmed someone like Michael Regan, who has made environmental protection the cause of his career, to lead the Agency and set it back on its proper footing.

Once we finish with the confirmations of these three nominees, the Senate will have confirmed 16 Cabinet-level officials. That is in addition to passing a massive COVID bill and conducting an impeachment trial of the former President—despite getting a late start to our work thanks to a delay in the organizing resolution. The Senate is going to keep up the pace.

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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President Biden deserves to have his team in place, working for the American people.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on the American Rescue Plan, later today, the House of Representatives is set to approve the American Rescue Plan and send it straight to President Biden's desk for his signature, capping a monthslong effort by the Democrats to pass bold COVID relief to defeat the pandemic and boost our economy. Once President Biden signs the bill into law, it will immediately become the most sweeping Federal recovery package in recent history.

Even a cursory reading of the headlines gives you a sense of the historic nature of this bold and so helpful legislation.

Here is one from yesterday from the New York Times:

Growth in the U.S. could surge on the stimulus plan and a rapid vaccine rollout.

Wouldn't that be great? We think there is a very good chance of its happening.

Forbes:

U.S. Economy Will Recover Twice as Fast Thanks to \$1.9 Trillion Stimulus.

That is from Forbes, a conservative publication.

The Associated Press:

COVID bill to deliver big health insurance savings for many.

This is something so many Americans desperately need and want.

Here is another from the New York Times:

In the Stimulus Bill, a Policy Revolution in Aid for Children.

A policy revolution.

Simply put, the American Rescue Plan is one of the most significant Federal relief efforts that Congress has seen in a very, very long time. I am greatly looking forward to its becoming law.

Now, I have spent a lot of time talking about all of the different provisions of the bill today and in previous remarks on the floor of the Senate. That is because the American Rescue Plan is a truly comprehensive effort. COVID-19 has impacted nearly every aspect of American life. So we had to craft legislation that spanned the gamut: schools, businesses, families, jobs, healthcare. Because this bill is so wide-ranging, I haven't spent enough time on the significance of the individual programs.

I want to rectify that over the next several weeks. This morning, I want to focus on two initiatives: first, the child tax credit and, second, agricultural assistance for disadvantaged farmers.

According to the most recent data, more than 10 million children live below the poverty line in America—10 million children. A child starting out in life, through no fault of his or her own, lives below the poverty line, and

we know what that means in terms of food and healthcare and housing and education. Compared with other nations around the world, the United States dedicates a relative pittance—a pittance—to fixing that terrible injustice.

Listen to this. This is something that should make us both ashamed that the United States has been in this position for so long and proud that the American Rescue Plan will help rectify that injustice. Here it is: The United States ranks next to last among the world's 37 most developed economies in terms of family benefits—barely ahead of Turkey—nothing that can make Americans proud.

Of course, the pandemic has made the problem of child poverty even worse. It has forced parents to serve as childcare providers and surrogate teachers while trying to keep up with their own jobs. For millions of Americans who lost their jobs through no fault of their own, the pressure only increased. The difficulty of childcare during the pandemic is likely one of the main reasons there has been a disproportionate share of women who have fallen out of the workforce. The pandemic has left mothers and fathers with impossible choices, between keeping their jobs and incomes or leaving work to care for their children, stuck at home, whom they so dearly love.

Democrats decided to tackle this problem head on in the American Rescue Plan. We expanded the child tax credit to provide up to \$3,000 per child, ages 6 to 17, and \$3,600 per child under the age of 6 for an overwhelming majority of families in this country. Analysts predict that this policy will cut childhood poverty in half—in half. That is an astounding statistic. It will cut childhood poverty in half. A goal of so many who have studied the frailties in some of our policies for a decade, for a generation, has been to remove people—young children—from poverty, and half will be so removed.

That is just one reason reviewers have called the American Rescue Plan one of the “most far-reaching anti-poverty efforts in an [entire] generation.”

A salute to SHERRON BROWN, MICHAEL BENNET, and CORY BOOKER, who really spearheaded this, along with Congressman NEAL in the House; RON WYDEN and his committee that worked on drafting it; and my staffers who spent so much time on making this work as well. A salute to them.

Now, another provision that has received too little attention is the support this bill will provide to disadvantaged farmers. Across nearly every statistic, farmers from socially disadvantaged communities fare worse than their White counterparts, suffering from generations of systemic discrimination, land loss, and what Secretary Vilsack calls a “cycle of debt.” It is almost something that recalls the days of slavery and sharecropping and tenant farming. Recently, these farmers have suffered again, disproportionately, from COVID-19.

The American Rescue Plan provides more than \$10 billion to support our Nation's agriculture and sets aside, roughly, half of it—half of it—for disadvantaged communities, particularly Black farmers, for debt relief, education, training, and land acquisition. Though it is only a small fraction of the overall bill, experts have called the American Rescue Plan “the most significant legislation for Black farmers since the Civil Rights Act.”

It is amazing what we can do when we put our minds to it. The hangover from the horrible treatment that rural African-American farmers have gotten since the days of slavery can, in part—in decent part—be undone by this legislation.

I want to thank some of my fellow Senators who did such work on this bill. The provisions I have mentioned owe a great deal to the members of the Agriculture Committee and the Finance Committee. Senator STABENOW was relentless in pushing this issue. Senator WYDEN, chair of the Finance Committee, helped out a great deal, and Senators WARNOCK and BOOKER pushed very hard as well.

The American Rescue Plan is going to have an immense impact on nearly every community in America. In the weeks and months to come, I will be highlighting how much good it will do.

I have a few housekeeping things to do.

SIGNING AUTHORITY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the senior Senator from New York be authorized to sign duly enrolled bills or joint resolutions on March 10.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

JOHN LEWIS NIMHD RESEARCH ENDOWMENT REVITALIZATION ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be discharged from further consideration of S. 320 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 320) to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide that the authority of the Director of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities to make certain research endowments applies with respect to both current and former centers of excellence, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time.